

Will Bombay Have a Plan?

Irrelevance of Planners and Their Plans

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Is Bombay's second Development Plan needed? Is it relevant to Bombay's needs? Would the city be better off with no Development Plan, but only a set of building rules? Does it make sense to adopt a plan for a period of which half has already elapsed?

I

Introduction

LIKE any other large city, Bombay has a myriad problems. From time to time prominent industrialists, officials and politicians pour out laments about the state of the city, each offering his own doleful diagnosis of terminal illness. About four years ago one of them, a former head of a large corporation and later a member of the Planning Commission, gave Bombay only five years more. So now we should be only a year away from mortal decomposition or anarchy.

Contrast this view of Bombay's gallop towards nemesis with the leisurely treatment Bombay's second Development Plan (for 1981-2001) is receiving from the Maharashtra government, which has had the plan under study for the last six years. Indeed, there is little reason to expect that it will receive the government's approval and come into operation by 2001—well before which, we are assured, Bombay will die. Incidentally, the Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC) began preparation of this plan in January 1977. It sent it to the government for sanction in April 1985. Eight years in gestation and six already in labour—with such a timetable it surely would be prudent to start preparing the 2001-2021 Plan at once. Incidentally, the gestation period in the BMC included publication of the draft for suggestions and close consultation with the Metropolitan Region Development Authority, a creature of the state government.

II

Planning Process

Greater Bombay, capital of Maharashtra, comprises the old (island) city and the suburbs, covering areas of 69 and 369 sq km, respectively. The 1981 census gave the population figures as 3.28 million and 4.96 million respectively, totalling 8.24 million for Greater Bombay. Provisional figures for 1991 add up to 9.9 million. The whole of Greater Bombay is administered by the BMC.

Bombay's Development Plans are drawn up under the Maharashtra Regional and Town Planning Act, which requires plans to be revised at least every ten years. All the authorities concerned find it convenient to overlook this injunction. The first Development Plan, for the period 1964-81, got official sanction in 1964 and still remains in force. The act prescribes that a Development Plan should regulate the use and manner of development of land in the city. It must,

inter alia,

- (a) allocate each plot of land for residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, recreational or other use;
 - (b) designate areas for public purposes, like markets, schools, hospitals, playgrounds, public utilities and community facilities;
 - (c) lay down building and development rules, floor area ratios, building heights.
- A vital, and probably crippling, omission in the law is its failure to require a thorough assessment of the resources available for execution of the plan. There is only one provision, an inadequate one, that prevents the government from approving a land reservation for a public amenity unless it is sure that the municipal body will be able to afford the acquisition of the land in ten years. Inadequate because there is no way to determine that a particular plot reserved in the plan is beyond the corporation's resource capacity. That kind of judgment could be made only about the whole set of reservations in the plan or a large sub-set of them.

Once the government approves a plan all development and building in the city must conform to it, unless the government later changes the allocation of specific parcels of land. This the law allows if the new exception does not "change the character of the plan". Over the two and a half decades of the first plan's existence and operation, resort to this exceptional power has been frequent and increasing. With land prices soaring, the pressure on the government from individual landowners affected by the first plan's prescriptions has been intense; on most of the many occasions when the government has yielded to it, that has happened for reasons unrelated to the public interest.

Bombay's first plan allocated land all over the city and prescribed rules as the law required. In most senses it was a dismal failure, because hardly any of the several items of development that it envisaged actually materialised. Moreover, the BMC could not find the money to buy more than a tiny fraction of the land the plan had reserved for public amenities (gardens, markets, playgrounds, etc). In fact, the owners of such lands lost interest in protecting them, so that most of them were overrun by squatters. The plan had estimated the cost of its implementation, but had made no serious assessment of the municipality's ability to meet that cost, trusting to vague hopes of outside help, from the State and Union governments.

In 1977 the BMC, which is the Planning Authority under the Town Planning Act, set

about revising the first plan. It was a Planning Cell, manned by civil engineers and architects, chiefly the former, that did the revision. Neither city planners nor geographers, nor economists nor sociologists. At the time when the cell finished its labours the corporation had ceased to exist as a composite elected body. Its functions were performed by a state-appointed Administrator. Aided by a strictly official Planning Committee, the Administrator reviewed the Planning Cell's proposals for the island city as well as the criticisms and suggestions they had evoked from the public. He then sent the part of the plan relating to the island city to the government for approval.

Before the Administrator could deal with the suburbs, elections had returned a whole set of new councillors, who quickly set up their own Planning Group to review the suburban part of the new plan. The corporation was now dominated by a large Shiv Sena majority, while the State had a Congress Party government. The Planning Group's composition reflected this dominance. The group's scrutiny of the suburban plan focused chiefly on individual designations of plots rather than on the important prescriptions in the plan, the policies proposed, the targets adopted, the rules to regulate building, the resource requirements, the municipal resources, and plenty more that a prudent planner for a large city might consider. Its obsession with the reservations gave rise to strong suspicions about its integrity, suspicions that were strengthened by the quality of the recommendations it made to its parent body, the corporation. Land values are very high in Bombay, and pressure to escape an unwelcome reservation correspondingly heavy. Landowners are often eager to reward those who aid such escapes.

Subsequent events suggested that the corporation's Planning Group for the suburbs might have worked out a spoils-sharing system with their councillor colleagues, for the suburban plan, newly manipulated reservations and all, passed through the corporation's hands at breakneck speed. Several wards out of the twelve in the suburbs are said to have received no more than ten minutes' consideration from the general body. And the population target, the policy recommendations, the resource constraints, got no time at all! For a plan to take the city into the 21st century this was speed, indeed.

This plan for both island and suburbs now needed the State government's sanction before it became law, as it were. But rumours of venality had preceded it, and the govern-

ment was disturbed over the reservations it was called upon to approve, as also over those that had fallen by the wayside during the councillors' Planning Group's proceedings. Concern within the ruling party in the State government was probably tinged with more than a little envy over what its own members had missed by being in a minority in the BMC.

Nor did anyone at the government or corporation level bother about the two-volume report that accompanied the reservation maps and professed to explain them as well as to spell out urban policy for the city's survival. This report was a verbose document of some 600 foolscap pages. It contained an account of Bombay's history, its climate and rainfall, the velocity and direction of wind, the age, sex composition and marital status of its people, and various other features, most of them peripheral in comparison to the economic condition of the population, on which you can find very little. It did make an attempt at a 2001 population forecast, but could not quite choose between a 12 or 14 million low and a 19 million high. So it decided on 9.87 million as a target figure for 2001! It explained this by pleading that the city would not be able to provide for a population level realistically estimated, so 9.87 million would be a sensible target to work on. At the time the report came to the government, Bombay's population was already 9.5 million, and said to be growing by a quarter million yearly. While they were about it the corporation's planning experts—the engineers who spent all those years writing their recommendations—could just as well have chosen a *population target to fit the current level of amenities*, to make life simpler for themselves. If you do not expect to have enough money to feed your infant son when he reaches adolescence, you merely predict that he will stay stunted; you need not then bother about his growing needs.

III

Massaging the Plan

Concern within the Maharashtra government over the councillors' operations on the new plan prompted the appointment of a committee, which it asked me to head, with the task of advising the government on the plan and its building control rules, the resources it would need for its execution and how they could be raised, and anything else germane to the issues involved.

With me on the Advisory Committee were the Chief Planners of the country's Town and Country Planning Organisation and the Bombay Metropolitan Region Development Authority, and a practising architect-planner, who had worked on a prestigious new town project in the sixties. The government gave us a year to complete our task.

From the start we regarded our task much less as a fishing expedition to uncover and reverse inexplicable or undesirable land reservation decisions than as an opportunity to upgrade the plan that the BMC had sent

to the government, and to write into it features that might more effectively serve the city and the people of Bombay. Our options in this respect were constricted by the provision in the law that forbids 'substantial' modifications of the draft which the government has received from a planning authority without a fresh invitation of public comment, and individual hearing of the new objections. That would have added a further delay of two or three years which, in our innocence, we imagined the city and the government could not afford. So, unlike most other governmental committees in our country, which quickly develop aspirations to longevity, we were firmly determined to keep within the time-limit the government had set. "While a longer work period", we wrote in our report, "might have produced a better plan, much less time would have been left for execution. Government and the people of Bombay, we believe, are better served by having an appreciable period to implement a plan that is less than perfect than by waiting interminably for an ideal plan that retains only academic value because there is no time to put it into effect."

Population Forecast

Rejecting both the BMC's absurd population target and the wild forecasts its planners mentioned only to ignore, we modestly indulged in some crystal-gazing on our own, bearing in mind the fact that Bombay's growth rate had begun to fall, and relating the numbers we could expect in each ward to the area available there, and to the movement that had already begun from the congested island city to the suburbs. The figure we adopted for 2001 was 12.5 million.

Plan Objectives

We searched the corporation's 600-page report in vain for the objectives that had informed the plan. In an earlier report entitled "Policy Plan" the planners had listed as the "main objective [*sic*] of the Development Plan" no less than twenty-four items, most of them of too little significance to qualify as objectives for such a plan. The improvement in the working of potteries, for instance, or the relocation of tanneries—two of the chosen twenty-four—could hardly be goals useful for giving the plan either a focus or a direction.

Although it was too late to fit a set of objectives on to the plan that had come to the government, we still believed it useful to identify objectives to guide our own work, to explain the plan to the people it was meant to serve, and in choosing among options in implementation. We thought the basic goal should be to promote and sustain growth with social justice in a resource-efficient manner. This goal, we suggested, should be translated into the following operational objectives:

- (a) to facilitate and promote economic growth of the city taking into account its role in the process of national development;
- (b) to improve the quality of life, particularly of the poor and deprived citizens of Bombay;

- (c) to minimise the negative externalities such as traffic congestion, over-crowding and pollution, which might occur in the process of economic growth;
- (d) to achieve these objectives in a resource-efficient way, where resources would particularly include urban land, energy, and municipal finances.

The BMC planners' light-hearted adoption of an impossible population target had left them indifferent to the needs of the city's economy and the imperatives that survive the efforts of planners to contain them. Having seen the dismal failure of attempts at 'decongestion' (horrid word!) and of reliance on floor area and dwelling-unit-density limits to achieve it, we were much less ready to believe in some optimum size for the city. We recognised the harm that cities suffer—and Bombay had suffered—from blind adoption of optimum size concepts, accompanied by a refusal of public authorities to provide services for population levels higher than those arbitrary size limits: when growth proved inexorable, services fell to intolerably low levels.

We therefore rejected as impossible and unwise the aim of limiting or reducing Bombay's population that had been an insistent theme of the environment lobbies in the city. Bombay in our view was a vibrant, thriving hive of activity, a robust source of strength to the national and the state economy. Its per capita net domestic product was nearly thrice as large as that of the rest of Maharashtra. To us the function of the Development Plan was to promote and sustain Bombay's economic growth, and simultaneously to raise the quality of our citizens' lives. The two were closely bound together: it was because people were poor that they lived in squalor and misery, even if the economic level of Bombay's poor might be higher than that of the rural poor. So it was necessary to promote additional employment in the city instead of trying to inhibit it, as the ecology enthusiasts had insisted. Clearly a reversal of the prevalent government policy of discouraging new industry and the expansion of existing industry was called for, with the obvious reservation that environmentally hazardous industry must be excluded. Similarly, commercial activity, trading and office-type employment must also be encouraged. This is what we wrote:

The development, and indeed the survival, of Bombay should depend not on a superficial vision of this city as an island in itself, isolated from the rest of the State and the country, but as an integral part of the national economic structure, and indeed an instrument of development for Maharashtra and India. A vital part of this larger picture is of course the employment pattern, and its corollary, the migration pattern. People come to Bombay not because they fancy the lights of the big city or because film stars live here, but because of their hopes of finding employment, prospects much brighter here than in the rural areas or the small towns. Nor can the same total level of employment be automatically attained by decentralisation;

the quantity of employment an economy generates is not a zero sum, so that activity barred in one place will necessarily grow elsewhere. What blanket bans of the kind the city-savers want can achieve if they are properly enforced is a locational spread *at a lower employment level* and at a higher cost to the economy. This is because economic activity, whether in industry or trade, depends for its prosperity on facilities available, on communications, on linkages, etc. These do not automatically sprout in officially chosen growth centres, and an activity barred from the city for which its own economic calculus indicates a preference may not be able to survive in an officially promoted growth centre, and may consequently not take place at all. The loss in such a case may not be only that of the individual entrepreneur but that of the economy as a whole.

Notwithstanding the aura of respectability that the curb on employment has acquired in the last two decades, therefore, the committee suggests that the official employment location policy be carefully reviewed. There may be a case for admitting certain activities, particularly those which pose no environmental risks, and for so locating them that they reverse the present commuting pattern (north-south in the mornings and south-north in the evenings).

Realigning the Plan

Our eleven-month effort aimed chiefly at moulding the plan to

- (a) bring more land for housing into the market;
- (b) persuade private landowners and builders to build houses for people in the low-income groups;
- (c) ensure that more civic amenities—playgrounds, schools, markets, etc—actually materialise;
- (d) fit within the resources available;
- (e) cope with two serious housing problems. I shall summarise in the following paragraphs a description of our effort under each of these headings.

Land market. The last twelve years have witnessed an unprecedented rise in land prices. This has been chiefly due to an artificial strangulation of the land market, which has withheld land from prospective house-builders. The principal culprit in this respect has been the monstrous Urban Land (Ceiling and Regulation) Act, which a government eager to establish its proletarian credentials enacted during the notorious Emergency of 1975-77. The act froze land transactions in the cities, and required expropriation of all areas in excess of certain ceiling holdings. For Bombay the ceiling is 500 sq m. Landowners' resistance to the law and growing corruption prevented the government from realising more than a fraction of the land it expected to get from this legislation, but meanwhile housing activity came to a standstill, and land and housing prices consequently sky-rocketed. The law contains a couple of loopholes, and we proposed their vigorous exploitation so as to bring more land on to the market.

Incentives for low-income housing. Bombay's first Development Plan had failed to recognise the economic condition of the

majority of the city's population. In elitist fervour the plan had prescribed built-up area to plot area ratios (called Floor Space Indices, FSI, in Bombay) and maximum densities which took most of the housing built in the city out of the reach of lower middle class and poor people. In the suburbs the density could not exceed 200 units per hectare (10,000 sq m). So to use up the FSI, which was one, tenements had to measure at least 50 sq m (550 sq ft). Construction cost alone for such a tenement would be nearly Rs 1½ lakh, and after adding land cost and developer's profit most of Bombay's lower middle class could not find the smallest such unit affordable. Even on HUDCO's concessional terms, monthly outgoings on a hire-purchase of such a unit would exceed Rs 1,500. Thus the only relief available to low-income groups was promised by the public housing programme, but the size of this programme was altogether negligible in relation to the shortage. Private developers were in any case not interested in building for these groups of people because there was enough demand from upper class people to absorb all their product at prices artificially inflated because of the ceiling law. To counter this disinclination we suggested a housing density of *at least* 325 units per hectare in several tracts of the city, mostly virgin areas. We proposed a 20 per cent FSI bonus if the density were to reach 450.

Reservations. With the absurd population target the planners had chosen, the set of land reservations for public amenities (schools, playgrounds, hospitals, markets, dispensaries, etc) were bound to fall short of realistic requirements. Nevertheless, the municipal councillors in their wisdom had reduced even these, for reasons that one can easily suspect. Moreover, for these same reasons, the reductions were not evenly spread over the several districts in the city. We tried to reverse most of these reductions.

Experience with reservations during the earlier plan period had not been happy, and this provided an excuse for the reductions the councillors had made. The municipal body had been unable, or unwilling, to spare money from its growing revenues to pay for the acquisition of the lands reserved for amenities, except to a very small extent. Partly to prevent a recurrence of this experience, we supported the concept of Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) that the municipal planners had proposed. Landowners whose plots were reserved would be encouraged to give over their plots free of cost to the municipality, but would retain the development potential, which they could use elsewhere, or even sell. We expected a very substantial response to this scheme.

Resources. The municipal body as well as the planners who prepared the second plan were obsessed with an impression that the BMC was too poor to afford the plan they had prepared. Against a total cost of Rs 3,419 crore at 1984 prices, to be spent by 2001, the planners thought the corporation could find only a pathetic Rs 20 crore each year for their plan.¹ To us, accustomed as we were to the BMC's mendicant tendencies, this poverty obsession was incredible. So we

had a careful study made of the resources available to the corporation. We found that no less than two-thirds of the plan could be financed from the municipal revenues. The gap did not worry us unduly, because of the FSI concession (TDR) I have just described, which would greatly reduce the cost of acquiring the land needed for public amenities.

Building rules and development control.

Apart from rewriting the Development Control Rules to make them more useful to architects and developers generally, we introduced a few features into them to promote the objectives of the plan. I have already referred to minimum density prescriptions and to TDR. We proposed a stretch of the TDR concept to help with two other problems. Bombay's housing stock is crumbling rapidly, thanks to our antiquated rent control legislation. The level at which rents are controlled makes regular maintenance and repair impossible. To induce landlords to rebuild decaying houses without throwing their tenants on the streets, we proposed that a landlord of an old building who rebuilt and rehoused his tenants should get a Development Right to that extent, which he would use in exactly the same way as the owner of reserved land. Large pieces of land in the city are also covered by slums, and we recommended that the owners of slum land should be similarly rewarded with Development Rights, if they built to rehouse their slum people.

IV

The Plan in Bumbledom

In August 1987, well within the period we had been given for our work, we proudly presented our report to the government, urging confidently

...that government sanction this plan as soon as possible. Any delay will attract a fresh flood of representations from applicants whose cases have already been dealt with. For government the temptation to look at such representations will be strong, but if it yields to that temptation it will have to set up new machinery to deal with them afresh, an iterative process that may end only in 2001. We are confident that, with all its flaws, the plan we submit today will result in a much more livable Bombay 2001 than Bombay 1987 is, particularly for the poor.

The State's chief minister, to whom we handed our report, directed that it be processed in a month. Today, nearly four years later, the plan is still in labour, with only occasional signs of delivery. The ministry has consulted everyone who happened along, including the BMC and some new committees within the government machinery. It is not clear whether the delay is simply the result of official doodling, or is a deliberate ploy to cover activity of another kind. For in April 1989, it suddenly became public that the government had been quietly releasing plots from reservation. The minister admitted to 285 releases. A major uproar ensued. There was a strong suspicion that the government had been indulging in the very same venality that it had so sanc-

timoniously deplored when the municipal councillors had been accused of it three years earlier. The press mentioned a sum of several hundred crore as the total take. An environmental group took the 'dereservation' case to court. Meanwhile, the plan continues its labour pains, although ten years of its life have ebbed.

At the end of February 1991, however, the government published the new building rules, which it renamed Development Control Regulations. They included a number of the innovations that the municipal planners had introduced or we had added. The impossibly low densities of the first plan were raised more or less as we wanted, with minima and not only maxima being prescribed. The TDR concept also survived, despite attacks on it in the interim. In misguided zeal that betrayed more confusion than clarity its assailants had identified it with the infamous 'floating FSI' that a former municipal commissioner had illegally allowed many years earlier. Builders had then surrendered the FSI potential of an unbuildable plot in the remote suburbs and secured in return an equivalent FSI in South Bombay. The new TDR system allows a movement of FSI potential only northward, in the suburbs.

For the first time the new regulations try to draw private initiative into the clearance of slums. They raise the FSI for slum land-owners *two and a half times* if they accommodate their slum people in the houses they put up. Since the slum hovels in most of Bombay are ground-level structures, they barely use up an FSI of one. Is it really necessary to pitch the incentive to private effort so high as 1.5 (i.e., 2.5-1) and more, which is what the landowner will have at his disposal after he houses the slum people? It is one thing to earmark special virgin areas for intensive use and high densities; you can then tailor the municipal services to these features. It is quite another to introduce high densities and high FSIs in slum pockets all over the city, where the level of services is already frozen and cannot be augmented.

V

Relevance of Urban Planning as Practised

The story of Bombay's second Development Plan offers some clues to the continuing irrelevancy of India's urban planners and the product they offer. Some of these clues relate to the process that development plans follow before they acquire legal force. The others concern the content of the plans our planners prepare.

Procedural Features

Endemic delays. The account I have given above demonstrates first the leisureliness of the planning process. The 1981-2001 Plan went into preparation four years before the start of the Plan period. Today, ten years into that period, it still awaits the government's seal of approval. Some of this lapse of time can be ascribed to the requirements of the law. The detailed survey of present land-use

FORM I-A

[See Rule 4A (1)]

Form of general notice to be given to the members of the public before giving a notice to the Central Government under sub-section (1) of Section 21 of the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act, 1969.

NOTICE

It is hereby notified for the information of the public that Kesar Enterprises Limited proposes to give to the Central Government in the Department of Company Affairs, New Delhi, a notice under sub-section (1) of Section 21 of the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices, Act 1969, for substantial expansion of their distillery undertaking.

Brief particulars of the proposal are as under:

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| 1. Name and address of the owner of the undertaking | : | Kesar Enterprises Limited
Oriental House, 7, J. Tata Road,
Churchgate Reclamation,
Bombay - 400 020. |
| 2. Capital Structure of the owner Organisation | : | Authorised Rs. 770.00 lakhs
Issued, Subscribed
and Paid up Rs. 359.528 lakhs |
| 3. Location of the unit or division to be expanded | : | Baheri, Tehsil Baheri,
District Bareilly,
Uttar Pradesh. |
| 4. In case the expansion relates to the production, storage, supply, distribution, marketing or control of any goods/articles, indicate: | | |
| i) Name of goods/articles | : | Absolute and Industrial Alcohol |
| ii) Licensed Capacity before expansion | : | 10.29 Million Litres p.a. |
| iii) Expansion proposed | : | 49.11 Million Litres p.a.
(Making 59.40 Million Litres p.a. after expansion) |
| 5. In case the expansion relates to any service, state the extent of expansion in terms of usual measures such as value, income, turnover, etc. | : | Not Applicable |
| 6. Cost of the Project | : | Rs. 10.45 crores. |
| 7. Scheme of finance indicating the amount to be raised from each source | : | (Rs in Crores)
Internal Accruals: 5.45
Loans from Financial
Institutions and/or
Lease Finance: 5.00
Total Rs. in crores 10.45 |

Any person interested in the matter may make a representation in quadruplicate to the Secretary, Department of Company Affairs, Government of India, Shastri Bhavan, New Delhi, within 14 days from the date of publication of this Notice, intimating his views on the proposal and indicating the nature of his interest therein.

For KESAR ENTERPRISES LIMITED

K.D. SHETH
Secretary

BOMBAY

DATED: 3rd May, 1991.

that the law prescribes takes very long.² So does the planners' painstaking collection of information about the city, much of it of dubious relevance to their task. And then the municipal body at the political level and the State government add their own dilatory processes, to ensure that the final product is obsolescent on the day it gets legal sanction.

Public involvement. The second weakness in the planning process as it has generally survived in India is its failure to evoke public participation or even interest. The law requires publication of the city plan before it goes to the government for approval, but seldom is this step more than a formality. For a population so widely uneducated, simply announcing in the newspapers that the plan is available for public scrutiny is clearly inadequate. No effort is made to explain its implications to the people it affects, at public hearings in each locality. So all that the publication achieves is an arousal of the landowners whose plots are affected by amenity reservations. They are generally the only persons who challenge the respective components of the plan. The vital interest of the general public in the provision of the amenities and therefore in the survival of the reservations finds no expression whatever. In Bombay it took a further depletion of the already inadequate amenity reservations—this time without even the formality of publication—to rouse a small public interest group into litigation to save the plan. The localities that would suffer from the deletions remained indifferent to the privations that faced them; they had no means of knowing.

Substantive Features

The procedural weaknesses I have listed are serious enough. But in comparison with the substantive weaknesses in our planning they pale into triviality.

Population targets. First among the basic defects is the planners' indifference to the economic facts of city life. It is an indifference that takes many forms. Let's look at a few. Despite their experience over many decades, Indian planners cling to their obsession with an optimum size for each city. They shut their eyes firmly to conditions in the rural areas and the comparative attractiveness of the cities to the rural unemployed. So they happily choose impossibly low population targets and scale amenity levels to those targets. When the numbers overtake their targets, as inevitably they will, the city is caught, so to say, with its pants down—a description not altogether metaphorical in our cities, with their primitive sanitation arrangements. Meanwhile, of course, the blinkered planners are no longer around to face the consequences of their misguided optimism.

Recent trends in Indian planning have favoured an endeavour to divert migration to large cities by creating growth centres near smaller towns. Some of these have succeeded. Others are dismal failures—in both cases, I suspect, at a higher cost to the economy than a sensible expansion of large city facilities. I have touched on this earlier.

Economic condition of people. But besides their 'optimum' obsession, planners also choose to ignore the economic condition of the people they plan for, their income pattern, and their desperate search for a livelihood. After the long years that Bombay's planners spent on their research, they could tell you all about age pyramids and death rates, sex ratios and the marital status of the people, wind patterns and velocities, humidity and the history of the cotton trade. Very little on the economic condition of the people for whom they were planning. Nothing on employment patterns, or on which industries specially suited the city, on the existence or absence of cottage or household industry and the utility of mixed land-use. So our city plans seldom cater to the needs of the unorganised sector, which in poor countries offer more employment than the formal sector. Their zoning, their controls, are trim and tidy, but take little account of reality, and therefore tend to be widely violated. Their land-use prescriptions in particular favour widely separated zones for residence as against employment centres, which require needlessly expensive transportation costs were they not so regularly transgressed. This allergy toward mixed land-use is also very costly in terms of energy.

Municipal resources. Another blind spot in our city planners' efforts is their carelessness about the resources available to pay for the plans they so blithely offer. We have seen how incredibly irresponsible Bombay's planners were in this respect. There was hardly a single city plan I saw during my time in the civil service that gave an idea of how the money would be found. So planners light-heartedly plan for the moon instead of searching for solutions to fit the earthly resources available.

Plan execution. Too little thought goes into the problems of plan execution and its monitoring, to the organisational requirements, to the need to tone up city management. Indian cities have suffered from a distrust at State-level of municipal bodies' ability to undertake capital improvements and a consequent readiness to create new 'development authorities' to handle large investment. For State governments such authorities directly under their control have meant openings to patronage, nepotism and downright corruption, because few of these authorities have turned out to be much more than real estate developers. They have offered their creators new opportunities for graft in land disposal. And their output often embarrasses the municipal bodies that have to take it over for maintenance, for which these bodies cannot find the resources.

Land banks. The urban ceiling law from which Bombay has suffered these last 15 years has actually been the culmination of a series of governmental interventions in the land markets of Indian cities. Many urban administrators and planners have supported a large-scale governmental effort to procure land, ostensibly in an attempt to curb speculation in land and what was seen as

excessive escalation in land prices. In the 'fifties Pandit Nehru eagerly promoted this effort in Delhi, and about 155 sq km of land were thus frozen, for gradual acquisition, development and disposal by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA). Actual development by the DDA went on at a snail's pace, with two consequences, both undesirable: (1) The price of land that escaped the government's dragnet soared to levels undreamt of before. (2) The DDA itself began to realise higher and higher prices for the little land or housing it put on the market. Like the private speculator, it revelled in these gains, setting an example that other town authorities all over the country fretted to copy, and did copy. With disastrous results so far as housing was concerned, specially poor people's housing, but often with illicit benefits for the ministers and officials who controlled these land banks. Governments' efforts as colonisers and land developers have seldom benefited the community.

In a practically free economy where speculation in commodities seldom attracts intervention, should speculation in urban land be frowned upon? Is the potential gain to speculators so far out of proportion to the risk involved? And if speculation must be prevented or contained, is it the Government that should undertake the task or are other mechanisms available to prevent a constriction of supply? A heavy tax on vacant urban land could be one valuable option.

Efficiency in land-use. The planning of land-use in cities poses at least one baffling problem: Poor people generally huddle densely near large employment centres. They need to be there because they cannot afford the cost of long commuting travel. Public housing projects for the poor need to be similarly located. Land near employment centres, on the other hand, tends to be very costly, and an allocation of such land to poor people at a subsidised price in a low-income housing project, or a sites-and-services project would clearly be inefficient. In any case, such subsidised allottees would soon be bought out, and the allottees would move on to adjoining areas to huddle in shanties again. What escape is there from this dilemma?

VI

Concluding Questions

Is Bombay's second Development Plan needed? Is it relevant to Bombay's needs? Would the city be better off with no development plan but only a set of building rules? Does it make sense to adopt a plan for a period of which half has elapsed?

Notes

- 1 A delusion the last Municipal Commissioner shared.
- 2 Unfortunately, the BMC seems to have wasted the data it collected for the second plan's land-use survey, as it did with the first plan's too. A valuable basis for continuous planning has been lost.